

GSRA Legislative Committee Team Participates in 33rd Biennial Institute

By Dan Coffee, GSRA Legislative Committee Member

GSRA's Legislative Committee team members participated in the 33rd Biennial Institute for Georgia Legislators held December 4th- 6th, 2022 at the University of Georgia (UGA) Center for Continuing Education in Athens, Georgia.

Hosted by UGA's Carl Vinson Institute of Government, the Biennial Institute has been a tradition since 1958. The three-day event provides legislators valuable time for learning, networking, and exploring state issues prior to convening of the General Assembly. This year, 53 new legislators joined fellow lawmakers for updates on topics such as transportation, electric mobility, mental health, cybersecurity, workforce needs and economic development. Faculty members from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government moderated sessions with panelists including government agency leaders, elected officials and business executives from across the state. New and veteran legislators count on the Biennial Institute to provide information and training that will help them make better-informed decisions for Georgia.

Your GSRA Legislative Committee team participated as an exhibitor in the Biennial Institute to effectuate our legislative goals and objectives. Early Sunday morning, Rhonda Floyd and Kip Mann set up the GSRA booth in preparation for the event. Then, over the three-day event, Chuck Freedman, Jim Sommerville, Dan Coffee, and Charles C. (Chuck) Clay networked and interacted with numerous legislators and state officials discussing GSRA legislative priorities, including COLAs. The three-day event wrapped up on Tuesday with a luncheon featuring the leadership from both houses and remarks by Governor Brian Kemp.



Governor Kemp addresses the 33rd Biennial Institute

The event provided an excellent opportunity to get acquainted with new legislators and to foster existing relationships with veteran legislators as part of our ongoing legislative efforts. Our team also visited with agency leaders, along with several members of the Governor's staff, stressing GSRA's role as an advocate for retirees and for active state employees.



GSRA's Chuck Freedman, 2nd from left, and Dan Coffee, 4th from left, with legislative members

The Georgia General Assembly is scheduled to convene on Monday, January 9th for the 2023 Regular Session of the 2023-2024 legislative term. This will be the first year of this new term.

Action Alerts and What We Can Do

As GSRA members, you can support the GSRA Legislative Committee team by getting to know and contacting your local legislators to support efforts to pass legislation beneficial to GSRA membership and, when necessary, to oppose legislation with potential negative impacts to our membership. You can find out who they are and their contact information by going to the GSRA website at <https://gsra.memberclicks.net/contacting-legislators>.

Personal visits and telephone calls are much more persuasive than messages and letters, although those do help. Over the coming weeks, watch for **Action Alerts** from GSRA as developments unfold in this legislative session.

Change Coming to Newsletter

Over the years members have let us know how much they appreciate the information they get from our GSRA Newsletter. As we come to the end of another year of publication, we bid our long-time Editor-in-Chief, Beth Morgan, farewell, but not goodbye. Beth is reclaiming her retirement in full, after producing our Newsletter and managing other GSRA communications since 2010. In 2023 Jay Jarvis will be stepping up and stepping in to assume those responsibilities. You'll learn more about them next month, when we profile them both.

GSRA Welcomes New Pres-Elect!



GSRA is very excited to announce that we have a new Pres-Elect, Robert Riddle, now serving as a statewide officer and GSRA Board member. Below, in his own words, is Robert's message to members.

Greetings, fellow GSRA members! I am honored the Board of Directors has appointed me to the position of President Elect effective January 2023. I look forward to working with our Board in the coming year to ready myself and offer my service for the presidency of GSRA in 2024 and the important work that will need to be done.

I did want to share a little about myself and my career to give you an idea of my background and work history.

I served my entire State career in the then Georgia Department of Human Resources (now Department of Human Services).

I started my state career as a ward attendant at Central State Hospital in Milledgeville in 1973. Upon graduating from Georgia College at Milledgeville in 1975, I was hired as a Caseworker at Baldwin County DFCS. I finished my Master's degree while a Caseworker and then went to work in 1977 in a new DHR program called the Child Support Recovery Unit.

I served most of my work career in the Child Support Program, working my way up from Agent to Regional Supervisor (later Regional Manager.) In the late '90s I took a detour into the DFCS Director's Office for a few years under Doug Greenwell, Anne Plant and Michael Thurmond in various capacities. With a change in the DHR Commissioner in 2000 I was appointed Director of the then

Office of Child Support Enforcement. During my tenure as Director in OCSE I did a lot of work with the the Governor's Office and the state legislature on child support and human services matters. I served as Child Support Director of OCSE until April of 2006 when I retired.

After retiring from DHR, I went to work in the private sector. Currently I work as a part-time consultant with Grays Peak Strategies (a consulting company) as a Principal working on leadership development, and their professional

services practice. Prior to consulting work, I served as a Director for First Data Corp and the Vice President of Business Development for Systems & Methods, Inc.

By way of education, I have a Master of Science in Public Administration and Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration from Georgia College and State University.

I currently live in Carrollton, Georgia with my wife Cindy and we have three children between us, as well as five grandchildren who know me as "Pop".

GSRA Returning to Columbus Oct. 2-3 for 2023 Annual Meeting

By Allan Hill

GSRA is already hard at work planning the 2023 Annual Meeting. As reported in the November Newsletter, Annual Meeting Planning Committee members traveled to Columbus in November for a site visit at the Historic Iron Works and we wanted to update members on the results of that visit.

In 2017, GSRA held its Annual Meeting at the Historic Iron Works. The Iron Works proved to be an excellent venue for our meeting, as over 250 attendees can attest. The Columbus Marriott, which is right across the street from the Iron Works, served as the host hotel and gave us a great deal for a downtown full-service hotel. The revitalized downtown area of Columbus offered a variety of dining and shopping opportunities. All in all, it was a great meeting for all involved, and GSRA was anxious to build on that positive experience for the 2023 meeting.

On November 16 of this year, the Annual Meeting Committee traveled to Columbus to meet with representatives of the Iron Works and Visit Columbus. We had a very positive site visit. Though we were familiar with the venue, they showed us some changes and updates that they have made since 2017. They also showed us some other options from what we had previously used. The staff at the Iron Works made us a very attractive offer to host our meeting.

The staff from Visit Columbus accompanied us to meetings with not only the Columbus Marriott, but also the new AC Marriott and the soon to be opened downtown Hampton Inn. All three hotels are within walking distance

to the Iron Works (although the AC Marriott would only be for those fit enough to walk six city blocks).

At the December Board Meeting, the Committee presented the proposal from Iron Works, and also proposals from Unicoi State Park and Lodge, Lake Blackshear Resort, and Brasstown Valley Resort. Our last two meetings were at Unicoi and Lake Blackshear respectively; holding our meeting at Columbus offers us a totally different experience. The Committee recommended that GSRA proceed with negotiations with the Iron Works, and the Board subsequently voted to move forward with plans to meet in Columbus.

Wherever we go we strive to stage a fun, informative, and worthwhile Annual Meeting for our members. We look forward to returning to Columbus and all it has to offer. The pandemic with all its health concerns and needs to shelter in place has dampened many older adults' enthusiasm to gather together at large events. However, we as board members of GSRA understand and appreciate the need for our members to work together and come together for the good of us all. Protecting our health and retirement benefits is our primary focus, and supporting each other so we realize we are not alone during these times is paramount.

Showing our retirement systems and state officials our strength in numbers and our resolve to protect what we were promised by showing up in numbers when we invite them to address our concerns is very important. That is why we look forward to seeing you next October in Columbus.

Top of Mind: New Year; Our Work Continues

By Beverly Littlefield



Janus, the two-headed Roman god of doors and passageways, symbolizes transitions. As we come to the end of 2022 and anticipate the New Year, we'll look both backward, to remember our accomplishments and

learnings, and forward, towards even further achievement of our goals. In 2023, we'll continue to work in two major areas: Legislative Advocacy and Membership Development. So, this month I won't bombard you with graphs, statistics and other talking points about why state retirees and employees are worth the fulfillment of a promise made years ago in state law: that of security in retirement through sustained purchasing power. Instead, I want to sincerely thank you for your support over this past year. Without it, there is no doubt that we would not have seen come to pass the historic rule changes adopted by the Employees Retirement System (ERS). These changes led to the reinstatement of an annually compounding Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA or raise.) The impact of the 1.5% COLA and the relative benefit retirees received were not as robust as we had hoped. The policy changes do, however, set precedent and provide the basis for future action on the part of the ERS Board, and the Executive and Legislative branches of government.

Regarding the COLA, the mantra often repeated to us in the halls of the Capitol last year was, "It's a start." We shall see. We have continued and will continue to pursue discussions with leadership and policy makers about further policy modifications that would make the full restoration of at least a 3% COLA a reality. We also will continue our support for the inclusion of GSEPS retirees in COLA eligibility.

We will keep a watchful eye on the Department of Community Health's (DCH) two-year process to solicit bids to negotiate new vendor contracts for the State Health Benefits Plan (SHBP) for 2025. Through our representatives on the DCH SHBP Advisory group, and other communications with DCH leadership, we will take every opportunity to provide input to assure that retirees' health care coverages are improved and available at reasonable costs. We very likely will be asking for your input to make the information highly credible and of value to the process.

This year we increased the scope of our advocacy work and addressed the Public Service Commission on the proposed increase to residential rates requested by the Georgia Power Company. While we were one voice among many, we represented state retirees specifically as being among those low- and middle-income citizens most impacted by utility rate increases. The Commission did scale back the rate increase that they ultimately approved: Instead of an average increase of \$30 per month, most residential customers of Georgia Power will see an increase of about \$3.00 per month. We know that more utility rate increase applications are ahead and there are other regulatory issues, including the future, long-term availability of natural gas resources, which we'll monitor.

Elsewhere in the Newsletter, you'll read about our Legislative Team's participation in the Biennial Training Session for newly-elected members of the Legislature. With so many new members after this election cycle, it was a prime opportunity to meet them and to tell GSRA's story. If you have a new Representative or Senator, *now* is a good time to introduce yourself, *before* the

Session starts on January 9, and to make GSRA's story even more personal for them.

We hope you'll join us in 2023 in making GSRA stronger than ever. On behalf of the GSRA Board

and Policy and Operations Committee, we wish for everyone a good year to come.

Local Chapter News

Macon/Middle Georgia

Macon/Middle Georgia local chapter met on December 3rd at Ole Times Country Buffet on Gray Highway in Macon. This was the chapter's Annual Christmas meeting with 30 members in attendance.

President Melissa Belk-Teague introduced the two speakers, Representatives Dr. James Beverly and Miriam Paris, both who support us receiving a 3% COLA annually. The membership had an opportunity to ask questions and questions were sent prior to the meeting. Both speakers addressed the questions and concerns of the members.



Representative Dr. James Beverly addresses the Macon/Middle Georgia December meeting

In addition to our speakers' presentations, the chapter also addressed other business, including growing the membership, which, according to our membership chairman, Melissa Belk-Teague, has been our main focus as a chapter.

The three membership activities we have been using to grow our chapter are:

1. At every meeting we have a membership drive and current members are encouraged to bring someone new or someone who stopped coming to the meeting.
2. We encourage members to enroll their spouse and relatives if they are receiving state health benefits or if relatives were state employees. Word of mouth seems to be the best way to get people there.
3. Posting events and meetings on Facebook gets people interested in participating.

We continue to use these activities because we get a different group each time we have an event, and it works because relationships are built through the members.

Macon/Middle Georgia's next meeting is March 11th at Ole Times Country Buffet on Gray Highway in Macon.



Macon/Middle Georgia members at the December meeting

We wish you and your family a very happy and productive new year!

Find your Georgia Legislators

Use this link to easily determine your current state legislators by entering your address.

[Open States - Find Your Legislators](#)



Donate to GSRA Legal Fund

GSRA's Legal Fund was established as a dedicated legal fund in the event that leadership, on behalf of its members, ever has to retain legal counsel. The fund will be used to cover all appropriate legal fees related to ensuring that retiree benefits are not reduced or eliminated. Every donation makes a difference. For more information and to donate to this fund click on the link below.

[GSRA Legal Fund](#)



We honor the CARE in healthcare.

Call our First Impressions team at 1-855-322-7660, TTY: 711, to learn how we can help care for you.



© 2022 Anthem Health Plans of Georgia, Inc. All rights reserved. Anthem Health Plans of Georgia, Inc. is a member of Anthem, Inc. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.



LIVE LIFE, UNINTERRUPTED.

KEEP LIVING YOUR WAY.

You can, with these benefits and discounts from **GSRA & AMBA**:

- Dental & Vision Insurance
- Long-Term Care
- MASA (Air and Ground Ambulance Plan)
- Cancer, Heart & Stroke Policy
- Accident Policy
- Medicare Supplement Policy
- Easy Issue Life Policy
- Hearing Benefits
- Discounts on Travel, Dining & more

Learn more: 1-877-556-4582

myambabenefits.info/gsra




GEORGIA STATE RETIREES ASSOCIATION

YOU ARE OUR PRIORITY

OUR MEMBERS FORM **THE FOUNDATION** OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Since 1926, we've guided ourselves on helping members build a solid financial foundation for their own families.

We're not salespeople, we're solutions people. That's why nobody can serve our members like we can.

APCU serves State and Federal workers, retirees and their families in Georgia. Visit APCU's exhibitor table at GSRA. For more information, visit apcu.com, or call us at (404) 768-4726 or Toll-free at (800) 843-5433.



APCU partners with Member Wealth Management, a financial services program, to help our members with financial planning, investments, insurance, as well as retirement and estate planning strategies.

APCU has invited Shavon Ramon, a Managing Associate with Member Wealth Management, to offer a great workshop, "Money Talk 101", at GSRA. This seminar is designed to facilitate conversations around financial milestones for retirees.

Topics will include:

- ★ The importance of setting financial goals
- ★ Understanding your current financial position
- ★ Preparing for a successful retirement
- ★ Income tax considerations
- ★ What your loved ones need to know



SERVING U.S. POSTAL SERVICE EMPLOYEES ★ STATE & FEDERAL EMPLOYEES IN GA ★ RETIREES & THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

This credit union is federally insured by the National Credit Union Administration.



UnitedHealthcare® is proud to be a sponsor of the GSRA Annual Meeting.

SHBP retirees give UnitedHealthcare® Medicare Advantage plans over 96% satisfaction.*

Visit us online anytime
Learn more at www.UHCRetiree.com/shbp
Toll-free 877-755-5343, TTY 711, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. local time, 7 days a week.



*2017 UnitedHealthcare Customer Experience Survey scores for Group Medicare Advantage plan members. Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare.
H2001_180921_041543_M

8PRJ44291